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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an activity developed at the University of Nebraska to familiarize prospective teachers with the process of developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities. The activity, titled "Experiencing the Change Process: Writing a Personalized IEP," acquaints students with the major IEP components. After students are taught about the requirements of the IEP and apply these to sample case studies, they develop their own IEPs which include a statement of present level of performance, goals, objectives, and methods of measuring each objective. Students periodically monitor, report, or document progress toward their personalized IEP goals and objectives. A pretest and a sample personalized IEP form are attached. (DB)

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Experiencing the Change Process: A personalized approach for IEP writing for preservice teacher training programs

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Runninghead: EXPERIENCING THE CHANGE PROCESS

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Abstract

The IEP is the instrument which projects, guides, and verifies student growth and change. However, the IEP process, indeed the change process, is very abstract and difficult to comprehend--especially when projecting goals and objectives for many students. This article describes one activity which familiarizes prospective teachers with the IEP process. The activity has been used effectively in a variety of preservice graduate and undergraduate courses.

Experiencing the Change Process: A personalized approach

Public Law 94:142, now IDEA, mandates that all students who qualify for special education programs or services are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The individual educational program (IEP) serves as the blueprint for each child's specialized instruction within the parameters of services agreed upon by team members. According to McDaniels (1980) the IEP serves as a communication vehicle for the parents and the school, it serves as the basis for resolving conflicts, it documents the allocation of necessary resources, it serves as a management tool for teachers, it fulfills compliance mandates, and it serves as an evaluation device by determining student progress. In short, the IEP is the instrument which projects, guides, and verifies student growth and change. In fact, the IEP process precedes and supports the instruction of students with disabilities in every special education classroom (Harris & Schutz, 1986).

For well over a decade, IEPs have been the subject of much discussion in the professional literature. Many studies and reviews, for example, have addressed teacher's attitudes and concerns regarding IEP development. One common concern is that developing IEP goals and objectives demands a considerable amount of clerical time, often at the expense of direct instruction (Krivacska, 1987). Price & Goodman (1980) for example determined

that on the average, multidisciplinary teams take 386 minutes to conduct the conference and write the IEP, with the majority of this time used to assess the student and write the final IEP document. More recently, it has been learned that teachers who use computerized IEP systems spent nearly half as much time writing IEPs as teachers who did not use computerized IEPs, although it was not determined if the time saved translated into more time spent on instruction (Krivacska, 1987). Another concern voiced by special educators is that even though IEPs were intended to represent each student's right for a specially designed program (Epstein, et. al 1992), IEPs tend to be developed to meet compliance mandates rather than to guide instruction (Smith & Simpson, 1989). Sadly, many teachers do not believe that the IEP is a useful tool in the day-to-day planning of instruction (Dudley Marling, 1985). Similar findings on teacher's views regarding the lack of the instructional value of IEPs are echoed by Margolis & Truesdell, (1987) and Morgan & Rhode, (1983).

Despite these concerns regarding IEP development, given the existing mandates, the IEP is likely to remain as the central tool which guides a student's specialized instruction. Yet the IEP process, indeed the change process, is very abstract and difficult to comprehend---especially for those just beginning their career in special education. Therefore, in order to promote positive attitudes toward IEP development, to foster a greater understanding of the change process, and to prepare perspective teachers for

their future role in IEP development, faculty members in the special education department at the University of Nebraska at Kearney developed an activity which caused preservice teachers to develop their own personalized IEP for one semester. This article will summarize the essential features of this preservice teacher activity.

The activity, entitled Experiencing the Change Process: Writing A Personalized IEP, acquaints students with the major IEP components. Throughout the semester students periodically monitor, report, or document progress toward their personalized IEP goals and objectives. Consequently, instead of merely memorizing the components of an IEP from a list in the textbook, students actually develop their own present level of performance, their own goals and objectives, and their own system for monitoring and evaluating progress.

The activity begins with the administration of an IEP pretest.

Insert figure 1 about here

As shown in figure 1, the pretest consists of 5 questions which students answer independently without consulting previous notes or texts. The pretest is not graded, and students are given one week to locate or verify the answers to the questions. Experience has indicated that many students do not realize what items on the IEP are mandated by law nor do they realize that their presence at an

IEP meeting is mandatory.

After discussion and clarification of the questions on the IEP pretest, students are presented with information on the present level of performance, the annual goals, and the short term objectives. In each case, clear examples are provided along with detailed class notes and required readings. Students are reminded, for example, that the present level of performance includes a narrative consisting of two to three paragraphs plus a listing of important test scores, that it is written to include factual statements only (no opinions), and that the statements should indicate specifically what the child is currently able to do and what the child is not yet able to accomplish. Students are reminded that the present level of performance is based on formal and informal test results and that it sets the foundation for the goals and objectives.

Next, students are reminded that annual goals are statements which project the amount of student growth anticipated in one year, they communicate a complete thought in 1-2 sentences, they utilize information from the present level of performance, they focus on an outcome, product, or task, and that after reading the goal, team members should be able to guess or predict the objectives. Students are taught that the goals must reflect the targeted areas of need, as indicated by the present level of performance.

Finally, students are taught that short term objectives are the steps needed to move the child from the present level of

performance to the goal, that they must be written in sequential order, that task analysis is used to determine the logical sequence of steps, and that each objective must include the students' name, the specific targeted behavior in observable terms, the date the objective is to be completed, the conditions under which the objective is to be accomplished, and the specific measurable criteria.

After writing the present level of performance, annual goals, and objectives based on several real case studies and after receiving specific feedback from the instructor regarding the quality of such IEPs, students are ready to write their own IEP for the semester. Students use a prepared form (see figure 2) to apply the skills already presented in class.

Insert figure 2 about here

Figure 2 provides students with a structured format with which to write a concise present level of performance, one goal, three objectives, and the method of measuring each objective. Students traditionally have written goals in the areas such as graduating from college on time, establishing a healthier life style, budgeting money, or developing more efficient time management strategies. After modeling from the instructor, who also writes a personalized IEP for the semester and shares this with the class, students begin developing their own IEP. Rough drafts are handed

in for instructor review, and then students write their final IEP copy.

Specific attention is placed on the importance of the objectives and the means of measuring each objective because throughout the semester students are asked to share their progress. The specific, measurable objectives, along with the specific means of measuring each objective are used to help students monitor and report their progress. Students are encouraged to use charts or graphs, if appropriate, as methods of documenting growth.

Students have reported that they have enjoyed this activity. Faculty members at UNK have discovered that this activity helps preservice educators write better IEPs, see the interrelatedness of the IEP components, and view IEPs as both a process and a product. As importantly, the activity teaches college students a process for designing personal goals which they can apply to everyday situations.

This activity can be modified in various ways depending upon the needs of the students and the emphasis of the course. Faculty members have incorporated this project in the Mainstreaming course which is taken by general educators, as well as special education courses in program planning, behavior management, and various special education methods courses. The activity is appropriate for any course which emphasizes the change process.

In the field of special education, the IEP remains as a powerful instrument which projects and documents change and growth

in targeted areas of need for verified students. Yet the IEP could not serve its purpose without individuals who are committed to becoming agents of change, who are able of developing reasonable expectations based on specific data, and who are able to design and deliver specific intervention programs which will foster positive change. Experiencing the change process: Writing a personalized IEP is one way of helping preservice teachers realize the vital role they play in the special education change process.

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Figure 1

IEP Pretest

1. What do the initials I.E.P. stand for?

2. What law mandates IEPs?

3. List at least (5) items which must be on an IEP.

4. How often must an IEP be reviewed?

5. List the individuals who must attend an IEP meeting.

Figure 2

PERSONALIZED IEP

for:_____

Present level of functioning:

Goal:_____

_____

_____

Objective #1_____

_____

_____

How measured?_____

Objective #2_____

_____

_____

How measured?_____

Objective #3_____

_____

_____

How measured?_____